# CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT WITH SPORTS CLUBS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AND LOYALTY

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether members of different socio-demographic groups differ significantly in their average results on conceptual variables related to following sports clubs on social networks. Socio-demographic variables such as age, education level, work status, and frequency of attending matches were recoded to compare groups. The findings revealed significant differences between male and female fans in terms of extrinsic motivation and attention. Female fans showed higher scores on extrinsic motivation dimensions, including Integration, Social interaction, Empowerment, and Reward, while male fans scored higher on the Attention dimension. Moreover, younger and older fans differed significantly on eight latent dimensions, including motivators, identification, engagement, and outcome. Younger fans were more motivated by Personal Identity, Rewards, and Information, while older fans were more motivated by Empowerment. Furthermore, individuals with different levels of education differed significantly in terms of the information dimension. Those with lower education levels followed sports clubs on social networks more for informational purposes, while those with higher education levels were less motivated by information. Lastly, employees and students showed significant differences in their average results on motivators, identification, engagement, and outcome. Students were more motivated by Personal Identity, Rewards, and Information, while employees were more satisfied with the social network of the sports club. These findings provide valuable insights into the differences among socio-demographic groups in their motivations, engagement, and outcomes related to following sports clubs on social networks. Understanding these differences can help sports clubs tailor their social media strategies to better engage with their target audience.

## KEY WORDS

socio-demographic groups, sports clubs, social networks, motivation, engagement

## CLASSIFICATION

JEL:    D12, L83, M31, Z13, Z29

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# INTRODUCTION

Social networks have revolutionized the way people connect and interact in the digital age. With the rise of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others, individuals now could engage with a wide range of topics, including their favourite sports clubs. The integration of social networks into the realm of sports has provided fans with unprecedented access to their beloved teams, players, and fellow enthusiasts, creating new opportunities for fan engagement and interaction. Understanding the socio-demographic differences in following sports clubs on social networks is of paramount importance for sports clubs, marketers, and researchers alike. By examining the motivations and engagement levels of different demographic groups, stakeholders can develop tailored strategies to enhance fan experiences, optimize marketing efforts, and increase deeper connections between clubs and their supporters.

This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of previous studies that have investigated the socio-demographic differences in following sports clubs on social networks. By examining the existing body of knowledge, we seek to identify key findings and trends that shed light on the varying behaviours, preferences, and motivations of different demographic groups in the realm of sports fandom. The review will explore several socio-demographic factors, including gender, age, education levels, employment status, and athletic background. Each of these factors has the potential to shape how individuals engage with sports clubs on social networks, influencing the types of content they consume, the level of interaction they seek, and the overall satisfaction they derive from their fan experiences. By synthesising the findings of previous studies, this literature review will provide valuable insights into the diverse ways in which different demographic groups connect with sports clubs on social networks. Moreover, it will highlight the importance of adopting a targeted approach in social media strategies to cater to the unique needs, preferences, and motivations of various fan segments.

Ultimately, the findings of this literature review will contribute to a deeper understanding of the socio-demographic dynamics that underpin sports fandom on social networks. This knowledge can inform the development of effective marketing strategies, the creation of engaging content, and the cultivation of meaningful fan experiences, ultimately strengthening the bond between sports clubs and their supporters in the digital era.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Sports fandom and engagement on social networks have become integral aspects of contemporary sports culture. As such, understanding the factors that contribute to disparities in fan behaviour among different demographic groups is crucial for sports clubs and organisations. This article aims to investigate the statistical significance of differences in average results on 20 conceptual variables across various socio-demographic groups.

## IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS TO CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT WITH SPORTS CLUBS' SOCIAL MEDIA

Numerous studies have contributed to our understanding of gender disparities in sports fandom and social network engagement. Authors from [1] discovered that women are more inclined to follow sports clubs on social networks for extrinsic motives such as social integration and interaction. Conversely, men tend to display higher levels of engagement and attention towards the sports clubs they follow [2]. These findings underscore the importance of developing gender-specific strategies that cater to the distinct motivations and preferences of male and female fans. Authors from [2] examined biased evaluations of in-group and out-group spectator behaviour at sporting events, considering the influence of gender, team identification, and threats to social identity. Authors from study [3] explored the role of gender in perceptions of

physical contact in professional basketball, shedding light on gender stereotypes and their impact on the interpretation of physicality in sports. The consumption of sports and identification with sports-related activities have also been studied in relation to gender. Koch and Wann [4] delved into the relationship between gender, identity, and sports consumption, investigating how individuals' gender influences their identification with sports and their patterns of consuming sports-related products and media. Furthermore, research by Chang, Schull and Kihl [5] focused on the degree of identification that sports fans have with their teams, considering the influence of gender and its implications for fan behaviour and preferences. Researchers from the study [6] compared the sport consumption motives of female and male sports fans, exploring the differences in motivations for attending and watching sports events and their implications for fan behaviour. Lastly, Prakash and Majumdar [7] examined sports fans' motives for using Twitter as a social media platform, investigating potential gender differences in motivations and their impact on fan engagement and social network behaviour. Recent scientific articles have contributed valuable insights into gender differences in sports fandom, further enriching our understanding of this topic. Pegoraro [8] conducted a study focused on understanding the factors that contribute to the development of sports fandom among women. Their research delved into the influence of parental influence, role models, and socialisation agents, shedding light on the processes involved in the formation of sports fandom among women. Exploring the consumption and identification patterns of female sports fans, Dietz, Bean and Omaits [9] conducted research that provides insights into the factors that contribute to female sports fans' engagement and identification with sports-related content. Their work helps to uncover the motivations and preferences of female sports fans in their interactions with sports media and athletes. Sveinson and Hoeber [10] conducted a study specifically focusing on sports fandom on Twitter, which showed a keen interest in gender differences. Their research examined how male and female sports fans engage with sports content on Twitter, highlighting the implications for their fan experiences in the context of social media.

Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights into the gender differences in sports fandom, including motivations, identification with teams, and social network behaviour. The findings highlight the necessity of developing tailored strategies to effectively engage male and female fans while considering their unique preferences and motivations.

Age is a fundamental factor influencing sports engagement and social network behaviour. It has been found that younger fans demonstrate higher levels of absorption in social network engagement, showing greater immersion and a stronger reluctance to disengage [11]. Additionally, they are motivated by personal identity, rewards, and information in following sports clubs on social networks [12]. In contrast, older individuals may display higher identification with the sports club's members and prioritise empowerment as a motivator [2]. It was found that the intensity of sports fanship decreases with age for most adults. The primary reasons for this decline are the need for more time, shifting priorities, and increased maturity, which reduces passion for sports. However, a minority of participants reported an increase in fanship, mainly due to stronger connections to teams and the social opportunities sports provide for spending time with family and friends [13]. Additionally, gender played a role, with most of those whose fanship decreased being male, while most of those whose fanship increased were female. More evidence is needed regarding the age demographics of live TV sports audiences and the decline of fanship with age. According to recent studies, these changes hinge on the intensity of fans' interest. Among avid fans, there appears to be a trend of increasing fanship with age, indicating that mediated sports remain a meaningful and prioritised aspect of their lives as they mature. In contrast, individuals with minimal interest in sports show a decline in fanship over time, potentially shifting their focus towards other activities perceived as more personally fulfilling as they age. These findings underscore the role of avidity levels in shaping the trajectory of sports fanship across different stages of life [14].

By incorporating the findings from these recent scientific articles, we gain valuable insights into age-related differences in sports fandom. These studies explore various aspects, including social media engagement, motivational factors, and generational influences. Understanding the preferences and behaviours of different age groups is essential for developing tailored social media strategies that effectively engage fans across the age spectrum.

## IMPACT OF LOYALTY TO THE SPORT CLUB TO THE CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT WITH ESPORTS CLUBS' SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has revolutionised the way sports clubs engage with their fans, offering a unique platform for interaction and content sharing. To understand the dynamics of consumer engagement on social media platforms, it is essential to examine the various dimensions that motivate fans, drive identification, increase engagement, and influence outcomes. Social media has brought about a transformative shift in the way sports clubs connect with their fanbase, offering an unparalleled platform for interaction and content sharing. To comprehend the intricacies of fan engagement on social media platforms, it is crucial to explore the diverse dimensions that drive fan motivation, increase identification, enhance engagement, and influence the resulting outcomes. In the era of digital transformation and engagement, the relationship between sports clubs and their fans has undergone a profound change. This shift has been facilitated by the widespread use of social media platforms, allowing for real-time and direct interactions [8]. Sports clubs have adopted a variety of strategies to engage their fans effectively. These strategies encompass content creation, live streaming, fan polls, and granting exclusive access to players, all designed to enhance the overall fan experience [15]. Moreover, the emotional connection between fans and their respective sports clubs plays a pivotal role in strengthening fan relationships. This emotional bond influences their level of engagement, willingness to attend matches, and propensity to purchase club merchandise [16, 17]. Social media platforms have revolutionised fan engagement by enabling two-way communication. This interactivity allows fans to interact with sports clubs directly, increasing a deeper sense of involvement and providing clubs with valuable feedback [18, 19]. Online fan communities, often initiated and nurtured by passionate supporters, have evolved into virtual hubs where like-minded individuals come together to share their love for the club. These online communities play a significant role in driving fan engagement [20-22]. The integration of gamification elements and fantasy sports into social media platforms has proven to be a highly effective approach for keeping fans engaged and emotionally invested in their favourite sports clubs [23]. Personalised content recommendations, tailored based on fan preferences and online behaviour, have emerged as a potent tool to boost engagement and maintain fan interest [24]. The involvement of influencers and brand ambassadors who align with the values and identity of the sports club has the potential to amplify engagement significantly. Such individuals can reach a broader audience and add authenticity to club-related content [25]. Fans tend to engage more with sports clubs that demonstrate social responsibility and actively support meaningful causes. This alignment of values increases a stronger emotional connection, further enhancing fan engagement [26]. Highly engaged fans are more likely to develop a deep sense of loyalty to their sports club. This heightened loyalty translates into increased attendance at matches, more merchandise purchases, and word-of-mouth promotion [27]. Engaged fans frequently evolve into passionate brand advocates, going beyond mere support to actively promote the club to their social circles, thus enhancing the overall reputation of the sports club [12]. Effective fan engagement strategies can lead to increased revenue through boosted ticket sales, enhanced merchandise demand, and more attractive sponsorship deals. Clubs that successfully engage fans are better positioned to attract sponsors and investors [28].

In conclusion, fan engagement with sports clubs in the digital age is a multifaceted and dynamic process. Leveraging digital platforms, increasing emotional connections, enabling interactive

strategies, and personalising content are all crucial in building a devoted and committed fan base. Engaged fans, in turn, become valuable advocates and revenue sources for sports clubs, underscoring the importance of understanding the intricacies of fan engagement in the modern era.

The theory of motivation stands as a contemporary approach to comprehending why consumers are driven to use social networks and media in a broader sense [29, 30]. Consumer motivation often arises from the perception that investing time and effort will lead to expected benefits [6]. When consumers view their engagement as a self-fulfilling objective, this reflects intrinsic value. Conversely, extrinsic motivation is characterised by the desire for additional incentives [31]. The values that consumers attain through their engagement can significantly impact various essential marketing outcomes. Notably, motivation theory has also been found to be applicable in research within the sports industry [32]. Therefore, this study delves into how socio-demographic variables influence consumer's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Comprehending the identification process holds a significant role in shaping strategic decisions concerning the effective allocation of resources aimed at nurturing consumer identification with either the brand, the virtual community, or both. Through a comprehensive analysis of various facets of identification, it becomes feasible to motivate consumers better to share positive recommendations and engage in activities beneficial to companies and their products [22, 33]. Additionally, delineating and gauging the influence of the identification effect underscores the need to situate it within a conceptual framework. It's crucial to recognise that consumers tend to identify with more precisely defined objects of identification. Hence, when examining the socio-demographic variances among fans, it is imperative to encompass both facets of consumer identification. This entails scrutinising distinct consumer identification objectives within the virtual community of the sports club brand and appraising consumer identification with fellow consumers within the virtual social community associated with the sports club.

By incorporating the findings from these recent scientific articles, we gain updated insights into the relationship between athletic background and sports fandom. These studies delve into various aspects, including motivations, engagement, emotional connection, and loyalty among different athletic groups. Understanding the unique needs and preferences of individuals with varying athletic backgrounds is essential for sports clubs to tailor their strategies and effectively engage fans across different levels of athletic involvement.

By exploring the statistical significance of differences in average results on 20 conceptual variables across various socio-demographic groups, this study contributes to the understanding of how these factors influence sports fandom and social network engagement. The findings can assist sports clubs and organisations in developing tailored strategies to enhance fan experiences and strengthen their engagement with diverse demographic groups. Consumer engagement in this article is presented as a multidimensional concept that includes relevant cognitive (engagement), sensory component (affective engagement) and behavioural dimensions (behavioural engagement). The established multidimensionality of consumer engagement determines the necessary integration of seven sub-dimensions of consumer engagement: enthusiasm, enjoyment, attention, absorption, sharing, learning, and acceptance [34]. Consumer engagement is reflected through various forms of behaviour that consequently result in a stronger and stronger consumer relationship with the sports club, which goes beyond traditional consumer loyalty metrics, such as frequency of visits, shopping behaviour, and future consumer intentions [32].

## RESEARCH METHODS

### DATA COLLECTION

In the empirical phase of the study, a survey was conducted among consumers and fans of basketball, football, and handball sports clubs. These particular team sports were selected based

on their popularity, societal significance, and the size of their social media followings. The data collection took place from June to December 2019 and was executed through a written questionnaire and an online form distributed via http://www.1ka.si.

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Certain socio-demographic variables have been adjusted to determine if there are statistically significant differences in the average scores on the 20 conceptual variables among individuals from various socio-demographic groups. These 20 conceptual variables encompass (i) dimensions of consumer motivations for engaging with sports clubs' social media, such as Entertainment, Personal Identity, Reward, Empowerment, Information, Integration and Social Interaction, and Brand Affection [32], (ii) two dimensions of consumer identification – Identification with club members [35] and Brand identification [36], (iii) six dimensions of consumer engagement on sports clubs' social media, such as Enthusiasm, Enjoyment, Attention, Absorption, Sharing, Approval [34], and (iv) three dimensions of engagement outcomes, such as Trust [37], Satisfaction [38] and Brand Loyalty [39].

The following research instrument was used, as shown in Figure 1, based on the study of the relevant literature.
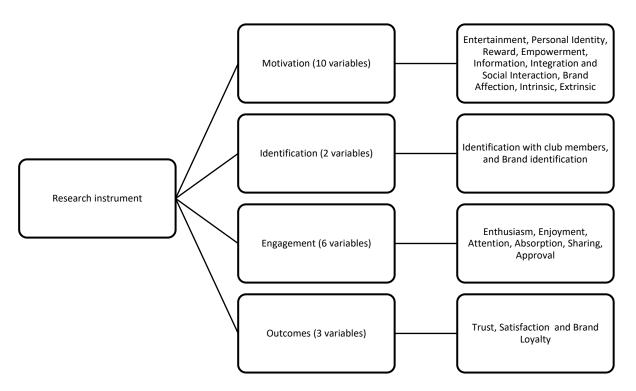


**Figure 1.** Research instrument.

The questionnaire included 14 questions designed to assess socio-demographic variables. It included closed-ended, dichotomous, multiple-choice, and Likert-type questions on a seven-point scale (ranging from "1 – strongly disagree" to "7 – strongly agree").

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS version 20 and the R statistical program.

With regard to age, the respondents were divided into two groups: younger consumers and fans of sports clubs who follow sports clubs on social networks (up to 34 years of age) and older

consumers and fans of sports clubs who follow sports clubs on social networks (35 and older years of age).

Considering the highest completed level of education, the respondents were classified into two categories: the lower level of education category, which includes respondents who have an elementary or high school level of education, and the higher level of education category, which includes respondents who have higher levels of education (undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate degree).

Considering work status, only employees and students were taken into account in the upcoming analyses because the number of members of the other groups was insufficient.

Considering the frequency of going to the matches of the sports club they follow on social networks, the respondents were classified into three groups: those who never go to the matches of the sports club they follow on social networks, those who do it once a year or less often, and those who go to the matches of the sports club they follow on social networks. They go to the club they follow on social media several times a year or a month.

Below, depending on the number of categories of socio-demographic variables, the statistical significance of the differences in the average results of members of different socio-demographic groups on 20 conceptual variables was tested using the t-test for two independent samples or analysis of variance for more than two independent samples.

# RESULTS

## DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

### Gender

Male and female fans differ statistically significantly on the dimension of Motivation and on the dimension of Attention, as one of the dimensions of the structure of consumer engagement on social networks of sports clubs, Table 1. Women are more likely to follow the social networks of sports clubs motivated by extrinsic motives; while they are in the Attention dimension, a higher average score was achieved by male persons for Attention. In other words, male fans, to a greater extent than female fans, spend a lot of time thinking about the sports club they follow on social networks and always find time to think about the sports club.

**Table 1.** The result of testing the statistical significance of the difference in average scores on the Attention dimension between male and female fans who follow sports clubs on social networks.

| Dimension | Levene's test | T-test | Variable | Variable categories | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | | | | Male ($n$ = 166) | Female ($n$ = 156) |
| Motivation – Extrinsic | $F = 0.037$ | $t_{(304)} = -2.177*$ | M ± SD | -0.061 ± 0.515 | 0.066 ± 0.500 |
| Engagement – Attention | $F = 0.009$ | $t_{(307)} = 2.037*$ | M ± SD | 0.106 ± 0.945 | -0.110 ± 0.916 |

*statistically significant difference with a risk level of 5%

### Age

Considering the motivators for following sports clubs' social networks, younger people (up to 34 years of age) are motivated to follow social networks to a greater extent by the indicators of Personal Identity, Rewards and Information dimensions and to a lesser extent by the indicators of the Empowerment dimension, while older people age group (35 and older) follow social networks to a greater extent for the indicators of the Empowerment dimension, and to a lesser extent for the indicators of the Personal Identity, Rewards and Information dimensions, Table 2.

Considering the dimensions of identification, members of the sports club's social network are identified to a greater extent by older persons (35 and over) and, to a lesser extent, by younger persons. In comparison, younger persons are identified to a greater extent by the sports club's social network brand, age (up to 34 years of age) and to a lesser extent by elderly people.

Considering the structure of engagement on social networks of sports clubs, members of different age groups differ statistically significantly in the absorption dimension, which is one of the cognitive components of consumer engagement on social networks of sports clubs. At the same time, younger people agree to a greater extent with the indicators of the Absorption dimension. In other words, when engaging in the social networks of sports clubs, people of a younger age get carried away to a greater extent and forget about everything around them. Time flies for them when they are interacting with sports club social networks, and to a greater extent, they are reluctant to stop interacting with a sports club on social networks.

Considering the results of consumer engagement on the social networks of sports clubs, younger and older people differ statistically significantly in the dimension of trust. Younger respondents express a higher level of trust towards the brand of the sports club's social network, while older respondents express a lower level of trust towards the brand of the sports club's social network.

**Table 2.** The result of the t-tests between younger and older fans who follow sports clubs on social networks.

| Dimension | Levene's test | T-test | Variable | Variable categories | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | | | | Up to 34 years old (n=200) | 35 and older (n=120) |
| Motivation – Personal identity | $F = 2.157$ | $t_{(302)} = 3.761**$ | M ± SD | 0.150 ± 0.923 | -0.251 ± 0.863 |
| Motivation – Reward | $F = 1.646$ | $t_{(302)} = 3.335**$ | M ± SD | 0.134 ± 0.885 | -0.223 ± 0.936 |
| Motivation – Empowerment | $F = 6.512*$ | $t_{(221)} = -3.037**$ | M ± SD | -0.123 ± 0.878 | 0.216 ± 0.980 |
| Motivation – Information | $F = 8.458**$ | $t_{(185)} = 2.397*$ | M ± SD | 0.096 ± 0.725 | -0.163 ± 1.011 |
| Identification – with members | $F = 0.240$ | $t_{(315)} = -2.007*$ | M ± SD | -0.088 ± 0.924 | 0.129 ± 0.953 |
| Identification – with brand | $F = 7.273**$ | $t_{(288)} = 2.277*$ | M ± SD | 0.082 ± 0.984 | -0.150 ± 0.811 |
| Engagement – Absorption | $F = 12.036**$ | $t_{(285)} = 4.265**$ | M ± SD | 0.175 ± 1.013 | -0.276 ± 0.823 |
| Outcome – Trust | $F = 2.362$ | $t_{(312)} = 2.072*$ | M ± SD | 0.080 ± 0.905 | -0.149 ± 1.023 |

*statistically significant difference with a risk level of 5%
**statistically significant difference with a risk level of 1%

## Education

By testing whether members of different educational groups differ statistically significantly in the average results on 20 conceptual variables, it was determined that people of different levels of education differ statistically significantly on the Information dimension as one of the motivators for consumers to follow social networks of sports clubs. In contrast, people with lower levels of higher education follow the social networks of sports clubs to a greater extent because of the information dimension indicator. In comparison, people with higher levels of education follow the social networks of sports clubs to a lesser extent because of the information dimension indicator. The result of testing the statistical significance of the difference in average scores on the Information dimension between people of different levels of education is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** The result of testing the statistical significance of the difference in average scores on the *Information dimension* between people with different levels of education who follow sports clubs on social networks.

| Dimension | Levene's test | T-test | Variable | Variable categories | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Education | | | | NSS/SSS | VŠS/VSC |
| | | | | ($n = 164$) | ($n = 157$) |
| Motivation – Information | F = 13.687** | $t_{(269)} = 2.022*$ | M ± SD | 0.095 ± 0.697 | -0.102 ± 0.978 |

*statistically significant difference with a risk level of 5%

## Employment

Considering the motivators for following social networks of sports clubs and the identification of consumers with the members of the social network of the sports club, in accordance with the previously detected differences between younger and older people, students are motivated to follow social networks to a greater extent by the indicators of the dimensions Personal identity, Awards and Information, and to a lesser extent indicators of the Empowerment dimension.

Considering the structure of engagement on the social networks of sports clubs, students and employees differ statistically significantly in the average scores on the Sharing and Absorption dimensions. Students achieved a lower average score on the Sharing dimension, while on the Absorption dimension, they achieved a higher average score.

Considering the results of consumer engagement on the social networks of sports clubs, a statistically significant difference between the average results of students and employees was determined on the Satisfaction dimension, where students are less satisfied with the social network of the sports club. In contrast, employees are more satisfied with the social network of the sports club. The result of testing the statistical significance of the differences between employed persons and students, along with the presentation of the average values of the analysed groups on the conceptual variables on which a statistically significant difference was determined, is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** The result of testing the statistical significance of the differences between employed persons and students who follow sports clubs on social networks.

| Dimension | Levene's test | T-test | Variable | Variable categories | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Working status | | | | Employees ($n = 200$) | Students ($n = 120$) |
| Motivation – Personal identity | F = 0.465 | $t_{(287)} = -2.867**$ | M ± SD | -0.148 ± 0.905 | 0.157 ± 0.903 |
| Motivation – Reward | F = 2.436 | $t_{(287)} = -2.263*$ | M ± SD | -0.095 ± 0.938 | 0.147 ± 0.880 |
| Motivation – Empowerment | F = 3.436 | $t_{(287)} = 2.110*$ | M ± SD | 0.105 ± 0.953 | -0.124 ± 0.885 |
| Motivation – Information | F = 12.856** | $t_{(252)} = -3.053*$ | M ± SD | -0.140 ± 0.965 | 0.158 ± 0.667 |
| Identification – with members | F = 0.425 | $t_{(298)} = 2.422*$ | M ± SD | 0.141 ± 0.953 | -0.120 ± 0.916 |
| Engagement – Sharing | F = 3.663 | $t_{(289)} = 2.174*$ | M ± SD | 0.117 ± 0.984 | -0.124 ± 0.909 |
| Engagement – Absorption | F = 7.040** | $t_{(283)} = -4.368**$ | M ± SD | -0.238 ± 0.847 | 0.236 ± 1.000 |
| Outcome – Satisfaction | F = 10.873** | $t_{(284)} = 2.122*$ | M ± SD | 0.121 ± 0.841 | -0.114 ± 1.064 |

*statistically significant difference with a risk level of 5%
**statistically significant difference with a risk level of 1%

## LOYALTY TO THE SPORTS CLUB

### Sports engagement

By testing whether recreational athletes, professional athletes, amateur athletes and those inactive in sports differ statistically significantly in the average results on 20 conceptual variables, it was determined that the members of the mentioned groups differ statistically significantly in the average results on six conceptual variables, namely on the dimension of intrinsic motivations for following social networks of sports clubs, two dimensions of (intrinsic) consumer motivators for following social networks of sports clubs, one dimension of consumer engagement on social networks of sports clubs, and two dimensions of the outcome of consumer engagement on social networks of sports clubs.

Considering the results of consumer engagement on the social networks of sports clubs, the mentioned groups differ statistically significantly in the average results on the dimensions of Satisfaction and Trust, with professional athletes statistically significantly different from recreational athletes and those inactive in sports on both dimensions, with recreational athletes and those inactive in sports are less satisfied with the social network of the sports club and show less trust in the social network of the sports club. In contrast, professional athletes are more satisfied with the social network of the sports club and show a higher level of trust in the social network of the sports club. The result of testing the statistical significance of the differences between recreational athletes, professional athletes, amateur athletes, and those inactive in sports, along with the presentation of the average values of the analysed groups on the conceptual variables on which a statistically significant difference was determined, is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** The result of testing the statistical significance of differences in conceptual variables between recreational athletes, professional athletes, amateur athletes and those inactive in sports who follow sports clubs on social networks.

| Dimension | Levene's test | Anova | | Recrea-tional ($n = 159$) | Profe-ssionals ($n = 30$) | Ama-teurs ($n = 56$) | Inac-tive ($n = 75$) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intrinsic motivation | $F_{(3.300)} = 0.670$ | $F_{(3.300)} = 4.276**$ | M | 0.043 | 0.246 | 0.016 | -0.203 |
| | | | SD | 0.644 | 0.651 | 0.569 | 0.580 |
| | | | Difference | $M_4 < M_2$ | | | |
| Motivation – Information | $F_{(3.300)} = 2.571$ | $F_{(3.300)} = 4.166**$ | M | -0.037 | 0.420 | 0.126 | -0.195 |
| | | | SD | 0.876 | 0.667 | 0.687 | 0.929 |
| | | | Difference | $M_4 < M_2$ | | | |
| Motivation – Brand affection | $F_{(3.300)} = 0.500$ | $F_{(3.300)} = 2.810*$ | M | 0.025 | 0.367 | -0.005 | -0.203 |
| | | | SD | 0.920 | 0.827 | 0.964 | 0.832 |
| | | | Difference | $M_4 < M_2$ | | | |
| Engagement – Enthusiasm | $F_{(3.303)} = 0.981$ | $F_{(3.303)} = 2.865*$ | M | -0.066 | 0.401 | 0.130 | -0.119 |
| | | | SD | 0.982 | 0.891 | 0.926 | 0.818 |
| | | | Difference | $M_4 < M_2$ | | | |
| Outcome – Satisfaction | $F_{(3.310)} = 4.206**$ | $F_{(3.310)} = 5.121**$ | M | -0.055 | 0.468 | 0.225 | -0.248 |
| | | | SD | 0.999 | 0.489 | 0.862 | 1,073 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1, M_4 < M_2$ | | | |
| Outcome – Trust | $F_{(3.310)} = 1.223$ | $F_{(3.310)} = 4.346**$ | M | -0.085 | 0.564 | 0.073 | -0.113 |
| | | | SD | 0.956 | 0.804 | 0.910 | 0.987 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1, M_4 < M_2$ | | | |

*statistically significant difference with a risk level of 5%
**statistically significant difference with a risk level of 1%

## Membership in the fan group of the sports club

By testing whether fans who are also members of the fan group of the sports club they follow on social networks differ statistically significantly in the average results on 20 conceptual variables from those fans who are not, it was determined that the members of the groups above differ statistically significantly in the average results on 18 latent variables, Table 6.

**Table 6.** The result of testing the statistical significance of the differences between fans who are also members of the fan group of the sports club they follow on social networks and those who are not.

| Dimension | Levene's test | T-test | Variable | Variable categories | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fan group membership | | | | That ($n = 73$) | Not ($n = 247$) |
| Intrinsic motivation | $F = 0.091$ | $t_{(302)} = 3.882^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.256 \pm 0.592$ | $-0.072 \pm 0.620$ |
| Extrinsic motivation | $F = 0.470$ | $t_{(302)} = -2.181^{*}$ | M ± SD | $-0.121 \pm 0.560$ | $0.032 \pm 0.491$ |
| Motivation – Entertainment | $F = 0.001$ | $t_{(302)} = 3.902^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.363 \pm 0.868$ | $-0.101 \pm 0.865$ |
| Motivation – Reward | $F = 0.444$ | $t_{(302)} = 2.196^{*}$ | M ± SD | $0.217 \pm 0.953$ | $-0.061 \pm 0.908$ |
| Motivation – Empowerment | $F = 0.009$ | $t_{(302)} = -2.697^{**}$ | M ± SD | $-0.268 \pm 0.926$ | $0.074 \pm 0.920$ |
| Motivation – Integration and social interaction | $F = 0.734$ | $t_{(302)} = -3.180^{**}$ | M ± SD | $-0.310 \pm 0.856$ | $0.082 \pm 0.907$ |
| Motivation – Brand affection | $F = 6.370^{*}$ | $t_{(134)} = 5.265^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.438 \pm 0.732$ | $-0.125 \pm 0.917$ |
| Identification – with members | $F = 0.007$ | $t_{(315)} = 6.855^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.624 \pm 0.879$ | $-0.182 \pm 0.877$ |
| Identification – with brand | $F = 7.890^{**}$ | $t_{(101)} = 4.924^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.501 \pm 1.021$ | $-0.148 \pm 0.846$ |
| Engagement – Enjoyment | $F = 1.493$ | $t_{(305)} = 3.817^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.359 \pm 0.855$ | $-0.102 \pm 0.896$ |
| Engagement – Enthusiasm | $F = 2.030$ | $t_{(305)} = 2.862^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.280 \pm 0.851$ | $-0.080 \pm 0.947$ |
| Engagement – Sharing | $F = 2.150$ | $t_{(305)} = 6.064^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.578 \pm 0.986$ | $-0.170 \pm 0.882$ |
| Engagement – Attention | $F = 6.949^{**}$ | $t_{(101)} = 4.633^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.477 \pm 1.009$ | $-0.140 \pm 0.866$ |
| Engagement – Approval | $F = 17.203^{**}$ | $t_{(130)} = -8.494^{**}$ | M ± SD | $-0.696 \pm 0.750$ | $0.207 \pm 0.881$ |
| Engagement – Absorption | $F = 7.454^{**}$ | $t_{(98)} = 4.659^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.505 \pm 1.069$ | $-0.148 \pm 0.884$ |
| Outcome – Satisfaction | $F = 8.274^{**}$ | $t_{(153)} = 3.980^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.337 \pm 0.763$ | $-0.105 \pm 1.014$ |
| Outcome – Trust | $F = 4.343^{*}$ | $t_{(131)} = 3.822^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.343 \pm 0.848$ | $-0.107 \pm 0.966$ |
| Outcome – Loyalty | $F = 1.553$ | $t_{(312)} = 5.908^{**}$ | M ± SD | $0.530 \pm 0.812$ | $-0.157 \pm 0.880$ |

*statistically significant difference with a risk level of 5%
**statistically significant difference with a risk level of 1%

## Attendance of matches of the sports club

By testing whether fans who differ from each other in the frequency of going to the matches of the sports club they follow on social networks differ statistically significantly in the average results on 20 conceptual variables, it was determined that the members of three different groups differ statistically significantly in the average results on 16 latent dimensions, Table 7.

**Table 7.** The result of testing the statistical significance of the differences between fans who differ from each other in the frequency of going to the matches of the sports club they follow on social networks.

| Dimension | Levene's test | Anova | | Never (n=74) | Once a year or less often (n=56) | Several times a year/month (n=190) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intrinsic motivation | $F_{(2.301)} = 1.328$ | $F_{(2.301)} = 6.715**$ | M | -0.154 | -0.158 | 0.109 |
| | | | SD | 0.673 | 0.622 | 0.591 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1, M_2, < M_3$ | | |
| Extrinsic motivation | $F_{(2.301)} = 0.188$ | $F_{(2.301)} = 5.596**$ | M | 0.118 | 0.109 | -0.082 |
| | | | SD | 0.489 | 0.496 | 0.510 |
| | | | Difference | $M_3 < M_1, M_2,$ | | |
| Motivation - Entertainment | $F_{(2.301)} = 1.934$ | $F_{(2.301)} = 8.372**$ | M | -0.291 | -0.168 | 0.167 |
| | | | SD | 0.946 | 0.766 | 0.858 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1, M_2, < M_3$ | | |
| Motivation - Integration and social interaction | $F_{(2.301)} = 0.354$ | $F_{(2.301)} = 4.652**$ | M | 0.149 | 0.228 | -0.134 |
| | | | SD | 0.902 | 0.945 | 0.883 |
| | | | Difference | $M_3 < M_2$ | | |
| Motivation – Brand affection | $F_{(2.301)} = 5.214**$ | $F_{(2.301)} = 24.351**$ | M | -0.430 | -0.382 | 0.280 |
| | | | SD | 0.907 | 1,038 | 0.755 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1, M_2 < M_3$ | | |
| Identification - with members | $F_{(2.314)} = 1.602$ | $F_{(2.314)} = 23.724**$ | M | -0.478 | -0.309 | 0.277 |
| | | | SD | 0.810 | 0.831 | 0.916 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1, M_2 < M_3$ | | |
| Identification - with brand | $F_{(2.314)} = 6.504**$ | $F_{(2.314)} = 6.381**$ | M | -0.293 | -0.097 | 0.141 |
| | | | SD | 0.816 | 0.764 | 0.984 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1 < M_3$ | | |
| Engagement - Enjoyment | $F_{(2.304)} = 0.937$ | $F_{(2.304)} = 4.076*$ | M | -0.264 | 0.041 | 0.094 |
| | | | SD | 0.829 | 0.850 | 0.934 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1 < M_3$ | | |
| Engagement - Enthusiasm | $F_{(2.304)} = 7.912**$ | $F_{(2.304)} = 9.171**$ | M | -0.223 | -0.333 | 0.181 |
| | | | SD | 0.926 | 1,213 | 0.804 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1, M_2 < M_3$ | | |
| Engagement - Sharing | $F_{(2.304)} = 5.917**$ | $F_{(2.304)} = 14.242**$ | M | -0.456 | -0.143 | 0.214 |
| | | | SD | 0.795 | 0.940 | 0.956 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1 < M_3$ | | |
| Engagement - Attention | $F_{(2.304)} = 2.077$ | $F_{(2.304)} = 4.905**$ | M | -0.271 | -0.076 | 0.125 |
| | | | SD | 0.847 | 0.925 | 0.950 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1 < M_3$ | | |
| Engagement - Approval | $F_{(2.304)} = 1.516$ | $F_{(2.304)} = 26.805**$ | M | 0.526 | 0.318 | -0.287 |
| | | | SD | 0.837 | 0.942 | 0.849 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1, M_2 < M_3$ | | |
| Engagement - Absorption | $F_{(2.304)} = 3.825*$ | $F_{(2.304)} = 3.046*$ | M | -0.227 | -0.048 | 0.101 |
| | | | SD | 0.849 | 0.970 | 0.997 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1 < M_3$ | | |
| Outcome - Satisfaction | $F_{(2.311)} = 26.898**$ | $F_{(2.311)} = 27.693**$ | M | -0.510 | -0.398 | 0.308 |
| | | | SD | 1,102 | 1,226 | 0.686 |
| | | | Difference | $M1, M2 < M3$ | | |
| Outcome - Trust | $F_{(2.311)} = 1.520$ | $F_{(2.311)} = 7.228**$ | M | -0.250 | -0.247 | 0.162 |
| | | | SD | 0.978 | 1,047 | 0.891 |
| | | | Difference | $M1, M2 < M3$ | | |
| Outcome - Loyalty | $F_{(2.311)} = 3.199*$ | $F_{(2.311)} = 34.261**$ | M | -0.596 | -0.250 | 0.306 |
| | | | SD | 0.778 | 0.981 | 0.797 |
| | | | Difference | $M_1 < M_3$ | | |

*statistically significant difference with a risk level of 5%
**statistically significant difference with a risk level of 1%

Considering the structure of engagement on social networks of sports clubs, those fans who most often go to the matches of the sports club they follow on social networks agree to a greater extent with the indicators of the dimensions of Enjoyment, Enthusiasm, Sharing, Attention and Absorption. In comparison, they agree to a lesser extent with the indicators of the Approval dimension; while considering the outcomes of consumer engagement on the social networks of sports clubs, they show higher levels of Satisfaction, Trust and Loyalty towards the brand of the social network of the sports club.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the differences among various socio-demographic groups in terms of their motivations, engagement, and outcomes in following sports clubs on social networks. These distinctions hold significant implications for sports clubs looking to optimise their social media strategies and better connect with their diverse fan base.

### DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Table 8 summarises the differences in consumer engagement with sports clubs on social media based on various demographic factors, including gender, age, education, and employment status, categorised into motivation, identification, engagement, and outcomes.

**Table 8.** Summary of differences between consumer engagement with sports clubs on social media according to demographic factors.

| | Gender | Age | Education | Employment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motivation | | | | |
| Entertainment | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Personal Identity | ⊘ | ✓ (1%) | ⊘ | ✓ (1%) |
| Reward | ⊘ | ✓ (1%) | ⊘ | ✓ (5%) |
| Empowerment | ⊘ | ✓ (1%) | ⊘ | ✓ (5%) |
| Information | ⊘ | ✓ (5%) | ✓ (5%) | ✓ (5%) |
| Integration and Social Interaction | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Brand Affection | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Intrinsic | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Extrinsic | ✓ (5%) | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Identification | | | | |
| Identification with club members | ⊘ | ✓ (5%) | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Brand identification | ⊘ | ✓ (5%) | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Engagement | | | | |
| Enthusiasm | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Enjoyment | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Attention | ✓ (5%) | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Absorption | ⊘ | ✓ (1%) | ⊘ | ✓ (1%) |
| Sharing | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ✓ (5%) |
| Approval | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Outcomes | | | | |
| Trust | ⊘ | ✓ (5%) | ⊘ | ⊘ |
| Satisfaction | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ✓ (5%) |
| Brand Loyalty | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ | ⊘ |

First and foremost, gender-based disparities were observed, indicating that male and female fans exhibit distinct patterns in their motivations and attention on social media. Female fans demonstrated higher scores in extrinsic motivation dimensions, such as Integration, Social Interaction, Empowerment, and Reward. On the other hand, male fans scored notably higher on the Attention dimension. These findings suggest that female fans may engage with sports clubs on social media for social and empowerment reasons, whereas male fans may gravitate towards content that captures their attention. Sports clubs should consider tailoring their content to resonate with the specific motivational factors of each gender.

Age-based differences were also prominent, with younger and older fans showing significant variations in eight latent dimensions. Younger fans displayed greater motivation in Personal Identity, Rewards, and Information, whereas older fans leaned more towards Empowerment. In terms of engagement, younger fans exhibited a higher level of Absorption, indicating a deeper immersion in the content and a greater amount of time spent on social networks. Furthermore, younger fans expressed higher trust levels in the brand of the social network compared to their older counterparts. These insights highlight the need for sports clubs to adopt a more age-specific approach in their social media strategies, recognising the varying motivations and preferences of different age groups.

Education levels also play a role in fans' motivations, particularly in the information dimension. Fans with lower levels of education were more inclined to follow sports clubs on social networks for informational purposes. In comparison, the need for information drove those with higher education levels less. Sports clubs should consider the educational backgrounds of their fans when crafting content and tailor it accordingly.

Finally, fans' employment status also influenced their motivations, identification, engagement, and outcomes. Students exhibited a higher motivation in Personal Identity, Rewards, and Information, while employees expressed greater satisfaction with the sports club's social network. This suggests that students are more driven by personal identity and information-seeking. At the same time, employees may have different expectations or needs related to their engagement with the sports club on social media.

## LOYALTY FACTORS

Table 9 summarises the differences in consumer engagement with sports clubs on social media based on loyalty factors, specifically sports engagement, membership in a fan club, and attendance at matches.

In the motivation category, significant differences were observed in the entertainment dimension for fan club membership and match attendance (both at the 1% level). In contrast, the information dimension showed significance only for sports engagement (1%). Personal identity did not show significant differences across any loyalty factors. The reward and empowerment dimensions were significant for fan club membership at the 5% and 1% levels, respectively, but not for the other loyalty factors. Integration and social interaction were significantly different for both fan club membership and match attendance (1%). Brand affection and intrinsic motivation showed significance across all three loyalty factors, with intrinsic motivation being significant at the 1% level for each. Extrinsic motivation was significant for fan club membership and match attendance but not for sports engagement.

In terms of identification, both identification with club members and brand identification showed significant differences for fan club membership and match attendance, with significance at the 1% level. For engagement, enthusiasm was significant across all three loyalty factors, with significance at the 5% level for sports engagement and 1% for the other two factors. Enjoyment,

**Table 9.** Summary of differences between consumer engagement with sports clubs on social media according to loyalty to the club factors.

| | Sports engagement | Membership of the fan club | Attendance of the matches |
|---|---|---|---|
| Motivation | | | |
| Entertainment | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Personal Identity | ∅ | ∅ | ∅ |
| Reward | ∅ | ✓ (5%) | ∅ |
| Empowerment | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ∅ |
| Information | ✓ (1%) | ∅ | ∅ |
| Integration and Social Interaction | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Brand Affection | ✓ (5%) | ✓ (5%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Intrinsic | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Extrinsic | ∅ | ✓ (5%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Identification | | | |
| Identification with club members | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Brand identification | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Engagement | | | |
| Enthusiasm | ✓ (5%) | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Enjoyment | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Attention | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Absorption | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Sharing | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Approval | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Outcomes | | | |
| Trust | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Satisfaction | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |
| Brand Loyalty | ∅ | ✓ (1%) | ✓ (1%) |

attention, absorption, sharing, and approval were all significant for fan club membership and match attendance, with each at the 1% level. Lastly, in the outcomes category, trust and satisfaction were significant across all three loyalty factors at the 1% level. In contrast, brand loyalty was significant only for fan club membership and match attendance at the 1% level.

## COMPARISON OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND LOYALTY FACTORS

The conclusion drawn from the comparison of Tables 8 and 9 suggests that loyalty to the club has a more significant and consistent impact on consumer engagement with sports clubs on social media compared to demographic factors.

While demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and employment influence certain aspects of motivation, engagement, and outcomes, the influence is more variable and often limited to specific dimensions (e.g., extrinsic motivation by gender, information by age, and education). In contrast, loyalty factors such as sports engagement, fan club membership, and match attendance show a broader and more consistent influence across multiple dimensions of consumer engagement, including motivation (like brand affection and intrinsic motivation), identification, and outcomes (like trust and satisfaction).

This suggests that while demographics do play a role, the depth of a fan's loyalty – reflected in their level of engagement with the club (through activities like joining fan clubs and attending matches) – is a stronger and more pervasive driver of how they engage with the club on social media. Therefore, for sports clubs looking to enhance social media engagement, strategies that foster and leverage fan loyalty might be more effective than those targeting specific demographic groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research has revealed significant disparities among socio-demographic groups in their motivations, engagement, and outcomes when following sports clubs on social networks. The knowledge gained from this study has practical implications for sports clubs seeking to enhance their digital presence and connect more effectively with their diverse fan base. To maximise fan engagement, sports clubs should consider tailoring their content and strategies to align with the specific motivations and preferences of different socio-demographic groups. Recognising that gender, age, education, and employment status play a crucial role in shaping fan behaviour on social media, clubs can develop more targeted and personalised approaches to increase deeper connections with their fans. This tailored approach can lead to increased fan satisfaction, loyalty, and a stronger online presence for sports clubs in the digital age.

This study offers valuable insights into the impact of socio-demographic factors on fan engagement in sports clubs' social media. However, it has certain limitations. The study's sample primarily consists of fans of basketball, football, and handball clubs, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to other sports or regions. Data collection was carried out through written surveys and online forms via a specific platform, possibly introducing selection bias, as participants might differ from non-participants. The data rely on self-reports from participants, raising the potential for response bias and the likelihood that actual behaviours and motivations may only sometimes be accurately reflected. The data collection period occurred from June to December 2019, and given the ever-evolving nature of socio-demographic trends and social media behaviours, the results may only partially represent the current landscape. The categorisation of socio-demographic variables, such as education and employment status, may only partially capture the diversity within these groups, potentially concealing further insights. The study does not extensively consider cross-cultural variations in how socio-demographic factors influence fan behaviour on social media, despite the significant role that cultural differences can play in motivation and engagement. Despite these limitations, this study serves as a valuable foundation for understanding the interplay between socio-demographics and fan engagement in the sports industry on social media. Future research can build upon these findings while considering these limitations to refine our understanding of this dynamic field.

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